



By building and using a repertoire of teaching strategies and techniques, both new and experienced teachers are better able to help all students succeed in school.

Patricia Wasley

Teaching Worth CELEBRATING

How was school?" I asked Hannah, my willowy 8-year-old great-niece.

Usually thoughtful, precise, and carefully spoken, she twirled and whirled. "It was wonderful!" she said in a singsong voice, pirouetting around the deck. "I had such a good time! My teacher is the best, and we did lots of things, and some were very hard and I love her!"

"What makes you love her? What made the day so wonderful?" My husband and I, both educators, were a little astounded by her enthusiasm for her first day of school.

"First we read chapter books," she sang. "I love chapter books, and she reads so that you can see what is going on in your head, like the bubbles in cartoons. Then we planted lots of things to see how they grow. And then we did some math. It was review mostly, to make sure that we hadn't forgotten everything we learned last year. And there was lots of other stuff. She is just the best teacher, and she told me that I am very smart." Hannah was soaring in her excitement about her teacher, about her learning, about the prospect of another 179 days of school stretching before her like treats.

Sammy, her 6-year-old brother, sat at the picnic table

looking down, swinging his legs.

"So, Sammy. How was your first day?"

He is a shy cherub, who unfolds slowly in new situations into a sweet, playful, solicitous child. "It was OK," he said in a whisper, not looking up, legs going faster.

"What did you do?" we asked.

"Well, first she told us what we couldn't do. We can't talk without raising our hands. We can't get up and walk around without raising our hands. We have to be nice to everybody. We have to do our work or we can't go out to play. . . ." His voice trailed off. Wisps of his summer freedom floated away.

In defense of the teacher, we tried to reassure him. "It's hard work keeping 25 six-year-olds organized to learn so that they can be the president or firefighters or teachers or state senators when they grow up. What did you actually do, though, once she told you how to behave?"

"Well," he said. The swinging legs slowed down, then speeded up. "I don't know. We got our cubbies. And we had snack time, but we can't eat unless it's snack time or lunchtime. And we put all our stuff away in our desk—pencils and crayons and stuff. That's about it, I think." He sighed and

slithered off the bench in dejected exhaustion. Those 179 days strung out in front of him like unlaidd railroad tracks going up a steep mountain—hard, unforgiving labor with little incentive for the effort.

In all honesty, I don't know any more than that about either teacher—how long they've been at it, whether they will turn out to be quite similar or quite different, whether either description is indicative of their classrooms over time. Still, Sammy's and Hannah's first-day descriptions reminded me of the enormous responsibility that we have to nurture and support emerging teachers so that their interactions with children send kids soaring off to self-confident and enthusiastic learning.

Faced with an unprecedented teacher shortage, with daunting statistics about the need for new and well-qualified teachers, and with new sources of federal and state assistance, educators are thinking about how we might support emerging teachers to encourage the kind of inventiveness and commitment that Hannah's teacher modeled.

A Teacher's Repertoire

Teachers frequently ask whether the changes they make in their classrooms have a significant effect on their students (Wasley, 1994). To figure out whether kids

were actually benefiting from new strategies, several colleagues and I followed high school students for three years (see Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). We discovered a simple but important insight: A relationship existed between kids' interest and investment in their work at school and their teacher's repertoire of techniques for engaging them.

Each fall, kids described their enthusiasm for school—new teachers, new subjects. By midyear, their energy flagged when we asked how school was going: "Boring." "Same old thing." "We're not doing anything new."

Teachers' responses mirrored those of the students: enthusiasm at the beginning with growing frustration by midyear: "These kids are bright, but they just don't apply themselves." "Kids have media mentalities. They think that school should be fun and that we should entertain them. Some things just require hard work and effort."

We realized the root cause of this conflict. Kids quickly learn the routines embedded in their classes and develop sophisticated strategies for cutting to minimal effort. They divide up the homework, or trade responsibility for certain days' homework or for listening during lectures, or follow the

highlighted information in texts so that they don't actually have to read the material themselves. Many youngsters described the routine of school as stultifying, crippling their enthusiasm for learning.

Teachers, however, believe that they are varying what they are doing. When we asked teachers whether they had a repertoire of approaches for working with kids, most said yes—and then described curriculum as the source of their repertoire: "First I teach different organisms, then body parts, then the different systems within the body. . . . It's tough to fit it all in." What they lacked was the corresponding variation in pedagogical and assessment strategies. Curriculum—whatever the subject—was the renewable resource providing teachers with new and fresh stimulation. They assumed that variation within the curriculum would sustain their students. Unfortunately,

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the sameness of the days weighed heavily on the kids.

In every school, we encountered teachers who prevented kids from cutting out by using a range of strategies. An English teacher started the year by having the kids read and discuss a book, then write a paper. For the next unit, she asked them what they knew about poetry and how they would define it. The students conducted a two-week inquiry to generate a mutually acceptable definition of poetry with a range of examples to illustrate their definition. They compared scholarly definitions, provided examples that destroyed their own stereotypes, and generated their own poems. During the next unit, the teacher joined forces with the social studies teacher whose class was reading the Articles of Confederation. She engaged the kids in Socratic dialogue to generate opinions from their reading of the texts. And so the year went as she moved from one approach to the next, always presenting new curriculum but through a variety of pedagogical and assessment techniques that kept the kids with her, interested in the unfamiliar, wrestling with new intellectual strategies.

Most teachers do not demonstrate this range, not because they don't want to, but because they have limited images of good teaching. The ways in which they were taught and the isolation in which they work—never seeing others teach, never engaging their colleagues in scrutiny of their own work—have limited their range. Further, they've never had the depth of support to bring new strategies fully into their own repertoire. Teachers with a significant repertoire talked about how difficult it was to learn new techniques well enough to feel confident using them. The English teacher told us that she focused on learning about the writing process for five years because learning it well required that much time.



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Interlocking Teaching and Professional Development

To gather diverse images of powerful teaching, I sought out teachers who were changing their teaching to strengthen their work with children (Wasley, 1994). I hoped that capturing images of changing practice might help us develop the professional imagination we need to guide our efforts. A small sample of teachers affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools shared the work they were doing to vary their own teaching practice. However, these teachers pointed out that although changing trends in professional development sparked new life, these same opportunities often truncated their abilities to build the interconnected dimensions of teaching practices.

The constantly changing focus of support and development affected their work significantly and produced a counterproductive pattern.

A historical examination might make the point clearer. In past decades, researchers, professional development providers, and district personnel suggested that if we just focused on curriculum reform (the 1960s) or pedagogical reform (Madeline Hunter in the 1970s) or assessment reform (performance assessments in the 1980s) or multicultural curriculum reform (the 1990s), participating teachers would better meet the needs of their students and would be more likely to push students to higher levels of achievement. Most practicing teachers can compile a significant list of techniques or research-based approaches that they have been introduced to during the course of their careers, each with the same promise. For most of us, the focus shifted frequently; every few years (or worse yet, within a given year), teachers learned some hot new strategy or approach.

We might imagine that such a wealth of strategies might be just the enrichment that all teachers need to mature into strong, competent teachers. However, three dimensions confound this constantly

changing diorama of support.

First, many techniques were imported from outside the school and the classroom. Without significant attention to the data that exist within every school about its children and their needs, the teachers were never quite sure which specific problem the strategies were trying to solve. For many, the need to take each new trend seriously was diminished. Further, gathering strategies without connecting them to specific learning dilemmas inside their own classrooms made it less possible for teachers to track the effects of their efforts.

Second, the lack of support diminished the teachers' ability to learn deeply. Too often, teachers attended one-day, two-day, or weeklong seminars with no follow-up inside their own schools or classrooms. In addition, they were often the only person in their school learning about a particular technique. They not only lacked expertise as they began to build these techniques into their own practices, but they also lacked colleagues with whom they might brainstorm and troubleshoot.

Third, each new approach brought an implicit (sometimes explicit) assumption that if teachers could master the technique, it would reform all the other

dimensions of their teaching. Unfortunately, planning a new curriculum without attention to the kinds of assessments and pedagogical strategies that would best suit its aims diminished the potential of the new strategy. Although learning about new approaches in each dimension of teaching was stimulating, teachers were not always clear about how to make appropriate adjustments unless each dimension was considered in relationship to the others.

The Need for a Developmental Approach to Teacher Learning

Teacher educators face several problems in ensuring that teacher candidates are confident and skilled and know how to foster student achievement. First, teacher education programs generally last from one to three years. But two years for a

master's degree program, even with undergraduate majors and minors completed, is clearly insufficient to prepare teachers for a lifetime of teaching. Because little coordination exists among teacher-preparation programs, mentoring programs, and staff development offered by colleges, school districts, or unions, most teacher education faculty believe that their task is comprehensive preparation, which has profound effects on coursework and internships.

Too many courses become surveys of the field of child development or educational foundations in which students learn theoretical background but not practical applications. In addition, student-teaching experiences, complicated by a reliance on a number of players—student, cooperating teacher,

faculty member—are often too unfocused to allow students to work within a particular context. The result is that emerging teachers enter their first years of teaching with sound theoretical knowledge, but little practical skill.

To combat the problems that plague teacher learning, we need a comprehensive agenda for supporting emerging teachers and for extending a range of professional responsibilities—enough to keep the very best teachers engaged in an interesting, stimulating, growth-oriented profession.

Step 1. Developing a Repertoire

First, we need a confirming, complex image of teaching that includes a repertoire of techniques for working with children. Teachers need a range of strategies for dealing with curriculum,

A relationship exists between kids' interest and investment in their work at school and their teacher's repertoire of techniques for engaging them.





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pedagogy, assessment, and school context because students are different; no technique works every time for all kids.

We need to acknowledge that good teachers learn new techniques, skills, and strategies each year through systematic inquiry, including reading, researching, attending seminars, and experimenting and reflecting in the company of others. To build a repertoire, teachers need feedback from colleagues with significant expertise. At the same time, they need to work in the company of other colleagues who are focused on learning the same strategies. One kind of support corrects misuses and misunderstandings; the other provides a collegial atmosphere that allows individuals to understand the range of possibilities that any strategy or approach holds.

Step 2. An Interconnected System of Support

Once good teachers are constantly learning and building a powerful repertoire, we need to connect the pieces that support them. Colleges of teacher education need to collaborate with school districts and unions to provide a consistent and coherent image of teaching as the development of a

repertoire. All parties need to invite the active review of their work by the other two partners and to provide the same kind of critical friendship to their partners (Feinman-Nemser, 1999).

We have done too little to change the coursework and the field experiences of emerging teachers. Many colleges and universities engage with school-based partners by giving practitioners more responsibility for fieldwork without seriously engaging with practitioners about the other programmatic requirements that emerging teachers encounter. We have focused too much of the work of teacher education reform on changing conditions inside schools (Goodlad, 1987) and too little on changing the nature of emerging teachers' experiences while in college.

At Bank Street College, faculty are currently refreshing course content to prepare emerging teachers to work with children who bring all kinds of differences and to demonstrate how technology can be used as a pedagogical and assessment tool. On each course-design team, practicing teachers examine whether the course content is likely to strengthen an emerging teacher's work in her or his own classroom during the first two years of teaching, and they develop

technological applications for their own classrooms that demonstrate course content.

Step 3. Teacher Preparation in the First Two Years

Providing adequate support for emerging teachers requires that we see teacher preparation as the initial step in building a repertoire. We must narrow the focus significantly to ensure that graduates are successful in their first years of teaching. Such a focus allows college faculty and cooperating teachers to think more deeply about what new teachers need to run their own classrooms with diverse groups of children. It also solves some of the problems that cause many new teachers to leave the profession before they have gathered the expertise that they need to feel successful.

For example, new teachers need help with planning for a week, a month, and a year; moving kids from one activity to the next; incorporating children with disabilities or language differences; writing newsletters to parents from a culture different from the teacher's; and focusing lessons on skill acquisition and content knowledge. Such a focus makes teacher preparation more manageable, more immediate, and more exciting.

Step 4. Mentoring

School districts and unions need to build mentoring programs in collaboration with colleges of education. The mentoring process during the first two years of teaching should reinforce what it means to be a professional teacher. Mentors can help the new teacher refine the repertoire of techniques learned during preparation and then supplement that repertoire by adding a new set of strategies.

- New teachers need to learn how to learn about their students. They need to learn to use the available data—from standardized test scores to analytic records kept on each child to parent conferences to daily work and observations. Too often, new teachers build lessons and activities without regard for the students themselves. During this period, they need to work with experienced teachers who can help them understand how to use data.

- Mentors need to help beginning teachers understand that feedback on their teaching is essential to the sound development of a repertoire.

- Mentoring programs need to explicitly help teachers learn that any new

teaching. Tying district goals for teachers to state licensure requirements and to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards can help emerging teachers focus their energies on building a growth program that is responsive to the children they serve and that builds the overall capacity of the schools in which they work. Mentor teachers skilled in helping teachers assess their skills and progress—who can also help them understand the resources that exist within the district, in the union, and in continuing education or degree programs—must be available to help new teachers continue to build their repertoire of an ever-expanding set of skills for engaging children in learning.

Step 6. A Staged Teaching Career

Unions, colleges, and local districts need to collaborate to build a staged teaching career that allows experienced teachers a variety of leadership roles throughout their career. Undertaking this work is essential to our ability to retain excellent teachers. We need mentors who will work with new teachers during their first two years of

our children: a commitment to a life full of enthusiastic, stimulating, and difficult learning.

This agenda is substantial, but we must take such a comprehensive and coherent approach. We need only to think about our children's first days of school to understand the urgency. Hannah's and Sammy's teachers provide starkly contrasting images of teaching, and they remind us that the kind of support we provide for emerging teachers will have long-term effects for generations of children. Some teachers enable kids to see learning as an adventure on which the students are intrepid but skilled explorers; other teachers make learning look like a rule-bound set of uninspiring routines. We must enable all emerging teachers to build a repertoire that excites kids, keeps them engaged, and sends them twirling off to learn more. And we want to ensure that newcomers gain the skills that they need—not just to be organized, but to give kids a liftoff toward learning. We need to help emerging teachers feel the same way about their own learning that Hannah did about hers. If we can do that, teaching and learning will both be something to twirl about. ■

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approach to curriculum or pedagogy or assessment will have corresponding implications for the other dimensions of teaching. With this kind of focused support, new teachers should have a greater sense of how to organize their professional growth as they begin their third year of teaching.

Step 5. Professional Development

The idea that a teacher must build a broad, rich, complex repertoire of approaches and strategies should be clearly embedded in a teacher's conception of his or her responsibilities. The next phase of supporting new teachers builds on work done both in preparation and in the two years of mentored

teaching, and others who can support teachers who are in crisis. We need mentors who can guide teachers toward and through certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. We need teachers who can develop programs for parents and caregivers. We need teacher leaders who map student experiences within a school to help faculty understand whether the total program is likely to build students' necessary skills. We need teacher leaders to build coherence among schools so that we share responsibility for student growth and development. All these roles are needed to build a profession that requires that its members mirror what we most want for

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